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Iain Mckay, Anarcho
The State and Revolution
Theory and Practice
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# The State and Revolution

**Theory and Practice**

Iain Mckay, Anarcho

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the degeneration. Ideas matter – particularly the ideas of those at the highest levels of the State. Structures matter – particular as these are not neutral but reflect class interests and needs as well as shaping the decisions made by those in power and by either fostering or hindering meaningful mass participation in society. Both the ideas and structures advocated by Lenin in 1917 had their (negative) impact.

That the Bolsheviks were initially elected did not undermine the dynamics inherent in the centralised political and economic structures they favoured and built. A bloated bureaucratic State and a state-capitalist economy were inevitable given the simplistic Marxist formulas believed in and the structures they favoured. Rather than the pressures of civil war producing Bolshevik authoritarianism, the reality is that the combination of Bolshevik ideology and its favoured (centralised, top-down) structures which produced this outcome – and confirmed anarchist theory.

In a way, then, Lenin was right was argue that "[s]o long as the state exists there is no freedom. When there is freedom, there will be no state." (379) His error was thinking that a State – a centralised, hierarchical structure developed by the few to secure their rule – could be utilised in a different way by the many. Even when based on workers' organisations it quickly reverted to its role – of securing minority rule, in this case that of the party leadership and the bureaucracy which any centralised structure generates. Anarchist warnings were proven right and only anarchism offers a solution: in the form of a federalist, self-managed, bottom-up social organisation.

The Russian Revolution shows that it was not a case of the State *and* Revolution but rather the State *or* Revolution.



Author's Note: *This is almost my chapter in the anthology* ***Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counter-rrevolution*** *(Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2017). Some revisions were made during the editing process which are not included here. In addition, references to the 1913 French edition of Kropotkin's* ***Modern Science and Anarchy*** *have been replaced with those from the 2018 English-language translation. However, the bulk of the text is the same, as is the message and its call to learn from history rather than repeat it. I would, of course, urge you to buy the book.*

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There were three Revolutions in 1917 – the February revolution which started spontaneously with strikes on International Women's Day; the October revolution when the majority of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets voted to elect a Bolshevik government; and what the Russian anarchist Voline termed *The Unknown Revolution* in between when the workers and peasants started to push the revolution from a mere political change into a *social* transformation.

This Unknown Revolution saw the recreation of the soviets first seen during the revolution of 1905 based on delegates elected from workplaces subject to recall, workers creating unions and factory committees and peasants seizing land back from the landlords while unprecedented political freedoms were taken for granted after the tyranny of Tsarism. Hope for a better future spread around the globe and the October Revolution was welcomed by many on the revolutionary left – anarchists included – as the culmination of this process.

Yet by 1921 anarchists had broken with the regime with the crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion for soviet freedom. The Bolshevik State was, rightly, denounced as being politically a party dictatorship and economically state-capitalism. How did this happen?

It would be impossible to cover all aspects of Leninist ideology and practice as well as the anarchist alternative, so here we indicate the main factors at work in the process. Lenin's *The State and Revolution*[1] is taken as the focus for written during 1917 it expresses the aspirations of Bolshevism in their best light – as shown by the fact that even today Leninists recommend we read it in order to see why we should join their party. We will compare the rhetoric of Lenin's work to the reality of the regime that was created, the theory to the practice. By doing that we can see why the revolution degenerated and better understand – to use Alexander Berkman's expression – *The Bolshevik Myth* in order to learn from history rather than repeat it.[2]

[1] "The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution", *The Lenin Anthology* (New York: Princeton University, 1975), 311–398.

[2] Excellent anarchist analyses of the Russian Revolution include: Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970); Alexander Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth* (London: Pluto Press, 1989); Voline, *The Unknown Revolution* (Detroit/Chicago: Black & Red/ Solidarity, 1974); GP Maximoff, *The Guillotine At Work: The Leninist Counter-Revolution*(Sanday: Cienfuegos Press, 1979); Ida Mett, *The Kronstadt Uprising* (London: Solidarity, 1967); Goldman and Berkman, *To Remain Silent is Impossible: Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman in Russia* (Atlanta: On Our Own Authority!, 2013).



ship and state-capitalism. It was both well within a year and by early 1919 the reality of, and necessity, for party dictatorship became official ideology. Zinoviev proclaimed it at the Second Congress of the Communist International while Trotsky was still arguing for the "objective necessity" of the "dictatorship of a party"[1] into the late 1930s. The so-called workers' State was needed to repress the workers:

> "The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves [...] if the dictatorship of the proletariat means anything at all, then it means that the vanguard of the proletariat is armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself."[2]

As everyone is, *by definition*, "backward" compared to the vanguard and "vacillations" get expressed by elections, mandates and recall we have the logical conclusion of the vanguardism of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* in Trotsky's implicit acknowledgment that the party needs a State in "the proper sense of the word," that the working class is not the "ruling class" in the "new" State.

The reality of the Revolution did not reflect the promises made in 1917 yet we are still referred to the latter by modern-day Leninists. Yet looking closely at these promises, at Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, we can see the role ideology played in

[1] *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1936–37* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), 513–4.

[2] "The Moralists and Sycophants against Marxism," *Their Morals and Ours* (New York: Pathfinder, 1973), 59.

# Conclusions

If, as Lenin argued, the State is "a power which arose from society but places itself above it and alienates itself more and more from it" and "consists of special bodies of armed men having prisons, etc., at their command" (316) then the Bolshevik regime was most definitely a State… *in the normal sense of the term*. The notion that it was a semi-State or some-such cannot be sustained for from the moment of the Bolsheviks seizing power the soviets were marginalised from decision making and transformed from "working bodies" into talking shops while all around them a "new" bureaucracy grew at a staggering rate and the regime created regular armed forces, a specialised armed political police force with its own prisons, etc.

The key difference is that rather than being an instrument of the bourgeoisie or feudal aristocracy as had the Tsarist State it replaced, it was the instrument of a new minority – the Party leadership and the State bureaucracy. This ruling class combined political and economic power in its own hands and the latter slowly but surely replacing the former as the real power within the new social hierarchy.

While many anarchists concentrate on the Kronstadt Rebellion of early 1921 (presumably because noted anarchists like Goldman and Berkman arrived in Russia in 1920), the fate of the revolution was made much earlier. The Unknown Revolution had been fighting for its life from the start as the anti-Socialist tendencies of the regime expressed themselves rapidly – within six months of the October Revolution the so-called "semi-State" had all the features of the State in the "proper sense of the word" and well on its way to one-party dictator-



# Theory

When Lenin returned to Russia in April 1917, he quickly came into conflict with his colleagues by taking a radical position. Instead of arguing – in-line with Marxist orthodoxy – that Russia faced a bourgeois revolution and so required the creation of a republic and capitalism, he argued that the revolution be intensified and pushed towards *social* transformation by means of the creation of a new State based on the soviets. This and continued opposition to the Imperialist war saw the Bolsheviks gain more and more influence, going from a small sect to a mass party in the space of a few months.

He wrote *The State and Revolution* during this heady period and it aimed to theoretically justify this change in perspective. It was primarily aimed against those within the Marxist movement who disagreed with Lenin as well as, to a lesser degree, anarchists. The two are related for Lenin's positions on the need for *social* transformation and opposition to both sides in capitalist conflicts had previously been advocated by only anarchists.[1]

The "bourgeoisie and the opportunists within the labour movement concur in this doctoring of Marxism. They omit, obscure, or distort the revolutionary side of this theory, its revolutionary soul" and so "our prime task is to re-establish what

[1] For the 1905 revolution, see Peter Kropotkin's articles "The Revolution in Russia", "The Russian Revolution and Anarchism" and "Enough of Illusions" (*Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* [Edinburgh/Oakland/Baltimore: AK Press, 2014]). For his refusal to take sides in the imperialist Russo-Japanese War, see "La Guerre russo-japonaise", *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 5 March 1904.

Marx really taught on the subject of the state". Lenin does, as he promised, provide "a number of long quotations from the works of Marx and Engels themselves" (313) yet has to provide commentary in order to ensure that the reader interprets them correctly. This is because Marx and Engels did not argue quite as Lenin suggested they did. Similarly, his comments on anarchism – as well as distorting it – fail to address the real issues between it and Marxism.[2]

Lenin argued that "[o]nly he is a Marxist who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat." (334) The revolution requires "that the 'special coercive force' for the suppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, of millions of working people by handfuls of the rich, must be replaced by a 'special coercive force' for the suppression of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat (the dictatorship of the proletariat)." (322) The aim was "to overthrow the bourgeoisie, to destroy bourgeois parliamentarism, for a democratic republic after the type of the [Paris] Commune, or a republic of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, for the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat." (396) For the "proletariat needs state power, a centralised organisation of force, an organisation of violence, both to crush the resistance of the exploiters and to *lead* the enormous mass of the population — the peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, and semi-proletarians — in the work of organising a socialist economy." (328)

The current State was a bourgeois State and had to be smashed and replaced by a new kind of State and "it is precisely this fundamental point which has been completely ignored by the dominant official Social-Democratic parties and, indeed, distorted [...] by the foremost theoretician of the Sec-

[2] Space precludes discussing every aspect of this, for further discussion see section H of *An Anarchist FAQ* (*AFAQ*) volume 2 (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2012).



recognising the validity of anarchism – for it did not correctly predict the failures of Marxism by accident.

Finally, while the Russian Revolution shows the bankruptcy of vanguardism, it also shows the pressing need for anarchists to organise as anarchists to influence the class struggle.[3] The Russian anarchists – unlike their Ukrainian comrades – did not organise sufficiently and paid the price. Rising anarchist influence in 1917 could not make-up for the previous lack of systematic organisation and activity within the labour movement. Only anarchists having a firm social basis would have meant the Unknown Revolution becoming victorious against both Red and White authority.

[3] See section J.3 of *AFAQ*.

the failure of the Russian Revolution and the degeneration of the Bolshevik regime.

Regardless of Lenin's claims, anarchists do not envision "overnight" revolutions. Emma Goldman, for example, did not come to Russia "expecting to find Anarchism realised" nor did she "expect Anarchism to follow in the immediate footsteps of centuries of despotism and submission." Rather, she "hope[d] to find in Russia at least the beginnings of the social changes for which the Revolution had been fought" and that "the Russian workers and peasants as a whole had derived essential social betterment as a result of the Bolshevik regime."[2] Both hopes were dashed.

So anarchists did not and do not contrast the reality of Bolshevik Russia with an impossible ideal of a swiftly created utopia. Rather, the issue is whether the masses were building a better world or whether they subject to a new minority regime. Regardless of Lenin's claims in 1917, the latter was the case in the new "soviet" system with its ruling party, marginalised soviets, centralisation, bureaucracy, appointed from above dictatorial managers, nationalisation, and so forth. The Bolsheviks may have won the Civil War but they lost the Revolution.

The continued mass working class protests from the spring of 1918 onward (that is, during and after the civil war) indicate that there *was* a social base upon which an alternative could be based. This would involve – as anarchists argued at the time – keeping the soviets as delegates from workplaces and actually eliminating executive bodies; supporting the factory committees and their federations; supporting customer co-operatives; keeping democratic armed forces; protecting freedom of press, assembly and organisation; implementing socialisation rather than nationalisation. In short, recognising that freedom is not an optional extra during a revolution but its only guarantee, by

[2] Goldman, xlvii.



ond International, Karl Kautsky." (329) The anarchists fail to understand that this new State is needed just as they fail to understand that the "organ of suppression" is "the majority of the population, and not a minority, as was always the case under slavery, serfdom, and wage slavery. And since the majority of people itself suppresses its oppressors, a 'special force' for suppression is no longer necessary! In this sense, the state begins to wither away." (340) The State cannot be abolished as anarchists claim but it can and will disappear.

The practice of the Bolshevik regime did not match the theory but first we need to discuss the theoretical problems of Lenin's argument in order to understand why this happened for bad theory produces bad practice.

## The Paris Commune

The core of Lenin's argument rests on the Paris Commune of 1871 and the lessons Marx and Engels drew from it. Yet he fails to mention key aspects of this event and like Marx and Engels provides a superficial analysis of it. This is in stark contrast to anarchists, for example Kropotkin wrote far more on the Commune than Marx or Engels did.

The key aspect of the Commune for Lenin is summarised by this quote of Marx: "One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes'..." (336) Marx is also quoted on how it "was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time" (341) It, Lenin summarised, "replaced the smashed state machine 'only' by fuller democracy: abolition of the standing army; all officials to be elected and subject to recall" (339) and "was ceasing to be a state since it had to suppress, not the majority of the population, but a minority (the exploiters). It had smashed the bourgeois state machine. In place of a special

coercive force the population itself came on the scene. All this was a departure from the state in the proper sense of the word." (357)

Yet the Paris Commune was not a new State structure at all but rather was a transformed municipal council. Indeed, Lenin quotes Marx on how the Commune "was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at any time." (339) After the initial (spontaneous) insurrection on March 18th the Central Committee of the Paris National Guard refused to take power itself and instead called elections to the *existing* municipal council with its members elected from the *existing* municipal wards by means of (male) universal suffrage. The Commune, then, was no soviet.[3]

The *practical* conclusions which Marx and Engels drew from it was – as before it – that workers should organise in political parties and take part in "political action" to capture the State on the national level in the same way as the Communards had locally. Lenin confuses smashing the State *machine* with smashing the State itself.

It is also important to note that Marx's *The Civil War in France* is his most appealing work because it is mostly reporting what had happened during a revolution inspired by anarchist ideas. While Marx failed to mention it, the driving force behind the Commune's proclamations were Internationalists influenced by Proudhon. To see this we need simply compare Proudhon's position during the 1848 Revolution to that applied – and praised by Marx – in 1871:

> "We do not want the government of man by man any more than the exploitation of man by man

[3] Marx later suggested (in 1881) that it was "merely the rising of a city under exceptional conditions, the majority of the Commune was in no wise socialist, nor could it be." Karl Max and Friedrich Engels, *Marx-Engels Collected Works* (*MECW*) Vol. 46 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1992), 66



# Alternatives

It may be objected that we are indulging in arm-chair theorising and the fact that it was the Bolsheviks and not the anarchists who were facing civil war and imperialist intervention shows that anarchism should, as Trotsky proclaimed, be consigned into the dustbin of history. Except for two facts. First, the Bolshevik descent into authoritarianism *preceded* the civil war and, second, anarchists *did* face those challenges and did not succumb as the Bolsheviks did.

We have shown the former and space precludes a detailed account of the latter beyond indicating that the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine faced the same (arguably worse) pressures and encouraged soviet democracy, freedom of speech, workers' management, and so on while the Bolsheviks repressed them. After helping to defeat the Whites, the Bolsheviks betrayed the Makhnovists and crushed them after yet more months of fighting.[1]

This counter-example – flawed as any real movement would be compared to the ideal, undoubtedly – shows that ideas and structures *matter*. Thus prejudices in favour of centralisation, notions that "top-down" structures reflect "revolutionary Social-Democracy", impoverished visions of socialism, the privileged position of the party, the confusion of defending freedom with "authoritarian" methods, all played their part in

[1] Peter Arshinov, *The History of the Maknovist Movement* (London: Freedom Press, 1987); Michael Malet, *Nestor Makhno in the Russian civil war* (London: MacMillan Press, 1982.); Alexandre Skirda, *Nestor Makhno: Anarchy's Cossack — The Struggle for Free Soviets in the Ukraine 1917–1921* (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2004).

come 'declassed.'"[46] While self-serving, this argument reflected the notions raised in *What is to Be Done?* and the privileged position the party holds in Leninism – as the workers disagreed with the party by definition they were lacking class consciousness and "declassed."

In short, Lenin was right when he argued that the "essence of the matter" was has "*the oppressed class arms*?" (364) This was the case with new State and its various actions to dispossess the working class of its arms, to replace democratic militias with a regular-style standing armies, to create a political-police force. When workers' organisations, protests and strikes are being repeatedly and systematically repressed, it is a nonsense to suggest that the working class is the ruling class – particularly when this repression began so soon into the new regime.

[46] Aves, 18, 90.



> […] It is up to the National Assembly, through organisation of its committees, to exercise executive power, just the way it exercises legislative power through its joint deliberations and votes. […] socialism is the contrary of governmentalism. […]
>
> "Besides universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the imperative mandate [*mandat impératif*]. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, does not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty!… That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy."[4]

Lenin – like Marx – forgets to mention that the Communards called themselves *Fédérés* ("Federals"). As such, his complaint "that the renegade [Eduard] Bernstein" suggested "as far as its political content" went Marx's programme "displays, in all its essential features, the greatest similarity to the federalism of Proudhon"17 ignores the awkward fact that in-so-far-as Marx reports accurately on the revolt, he cannot help but appear to be a federalist

Lenin seems ignorant of what federalism means. The whole point of federalism is to co-ordinate activity *at the appropriate level*(and so cannot be anything other than bottom-up). Centralism, in contrast, co-ordinates *everything* at the centre (and so cannot be anything other than top-down). So when Lenin proclaims that when Marx "purposely used" certain words

[4] *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (Edinburgh/Oakland/Baltimore: AK Press, 2011), 378–9; he had argued this from the very first days of the revolution: "we are all voters […] We can do more; we can follow them step-by-step in […] their votes; we will make them transmit our arguments […]; we will suggest our will to them, and when we are discontented, we will recall and dismiss them." (273)

(such as "National unity was… to be organised") to "oppose conscious, democratic, proletarian centralism to bourgeois, military, bureaucratic centralism" (348) he was completely missing the point.

Likewise, Proudhon wrote of how "to create national unity […] from the bottom to the top, from the circumference to the centre" and how under federalism "the attributes of the central authority become specialised and limited" to "concerning federal services."[5] So the Communards talking of organising national unity and (to quote Marx) how a "few but important functions which would still remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as had been deliberately mis-stated, but were to be transferred to communal, i.e., strictly responsible, officials" (346) is an *expression* of federalism and *not* its denial. That Marx confuses the highest federal body with "a central government" does not change this.

Similarly, Proudhon also argued that it was "necessary to disarm the powers that be" by ending military conscription and "organis[ing] a citizens' army". It "is the right of the citizens to appoint the hierarchy of their military chiefs, the simple soldiers and national guards appointing the lower ranks of officers, the officers appointing their superiors." In this way "the army retains its civic feelings" while the People "organise its military in such a way as to simultaneously guarantee its defence and its liberties". Moreover, he predated Lenin on "the replacement of bourgeois democracy by proletarian democracy" (388) by contrasting "labour democracy" to existing forms.[6]

Given this obvious influence, it is not the case that "[t]o confuse Marx's view on the 'destruction of state power, a parasitic excrescence', with Proudhon's federalism is positively monstrous!" (347) For the Communards *were* federalists and while Lenin proclaimed that there is "not a trace of federalism

[5] Proudhon, 447, 698.

[6] Proudhon, 407, 443–4, 724, 750, 763.



other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon, all of which are highly authoritarian means. And the victorious party must maintain its rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries." (354) Ignoring the obvious point that it is hardly authoritarian to destroy an authoritarian system in which a minority of continuously imposes it will on the majority, Engels failed to see that in a State the "victorious party" will need to maintain its rule against the many as well as the few.

Space precludes a comprehensive account of labour protest under – and State repression by – the Bolsheviks. Suffice to say, from the spring of 1918 both were a regular feature of life in "revolutionary" Russia. Workers' protests and strikes regularly became general in nature and the Bolsheviks sent in troops and the Cheka, withheld rations, made mass firings and selective rehirings – all throughout the civil war period when, according to Leninists, the working class had become "declassed," "atomised" or had "disappeared."[45] Indeed, this argument was first raised by Lenin himself "to justify a political clamp-down" and as "discontent amongst workers became more and more difficult to ignore," Lenin began to argue that the consciousness of the working class had deteriorated" and that "workers had be-

[45] See section H.6.3 of *AFAQ* for an account of the massive and frequent labour protests – and subsequent repression – under the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks also clamped down even advisory bodies they themselves set up. In his 1920 diatribe against Left-wing Communism, Lenin pointed to "non-Party workers' and peasants' conferences" and Soviet Congresses as means by which the party secured its rule. Yet, *if* the congresses of soviets were "*democratic* institutions, the like of which even the best democratic republics of the bourgeois have never known", the Bolsheviks would have no need to "support, develop and extend" non-Party conferences "to be able to observe the temper of the masses, come closer to them, meet their requirements, promote the best among them to state posts". (*The Lenin Anthology*, 573) Yet even these were too much for the Bolsheviks for during the labour protests and strikes of late 1920 "they provided an effective platform for criticism of Bolshevik policies" and they "were discontinued soon afterward." (Sakwa, 203)

sorbs the vanguard of the proletariat, and this vanguard exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat" for "in all capitalist countries" the proletariat "is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts" that the dictatorship "can be exercised only by a vanguard". The lesson of the revolution was clear: "the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation."[44]

Yet, as Lenin argued in 1917, "it is clear that there is no freedom and no democracy where there is suppression and where there is violence." He was talking of the "freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists" but it equally applies to the working class – if the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class" (373) is suppressing the working class itself then that class cannot be the ruling class, then its self-proclaimed "vanguard" is in fact the ruling class and just like "under capitalism we have the state in the proper sense of the word, that is, a special machine for the suppression of one class by another, and, what is more, of the majority by the minority." (374)

Lenin did, in passing, mention this in 1917 for he talks of the "organised control over the insignificant capitalist minority" and "over the workers who have been thoroughly corrupted by capitalism" (383) but he failed to indicate that this latter category was defined by how much they agreed with the party leadership. Soon it amounted to the bulk of the working class – and pressure "from above" by the "revolutionary government" unsurprisingly was stronger than that "from below" by the citizens. That this minority was the class of the State bureaucracy – armed with political *and* economic power – did not make it any less exploitative or oppressive.

This is the grim reality of Engels comment that a "revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the

[44] *CW* 32: 20–1.



in Marx's above-quoted observation on the experience of the Commune" (347) there had to be if his account were remotely accurate. That before and after the Commune Marx was a centralist does not distract from his reporting on the Communards but it does mean we cannot, as Lenin wishes, take *The Civil War in France* as the definitive account of his ideas on social transformation.

While for Lenin Marx had "tried to draw practical lessons" from and so "'learned' from the Commune", (344) in fact anarchists provided a deeper analysis of the revolt. For Kropotkin, by "proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle" but "they stopped mid-course" and gave "themselves a Communal Council copied from the old municipal councils." Thus the Paris Commune did not "break with the tradition of the State, of representative government, and it did not attempt to achieve within the Commune that organisation from the simple to the complex it inaugurated by proclaiming the independence and free federation of the Communes." The elected revolutionaries were isolated from the masses and shut-up in the town hall which lead to disaster as the Commune council became "immobilised, in the midst of paperwork," lost "the inspiration that comes from continual contact with the masses" and so "they themselves paralysed the popular initiative."[7] This is confirmed by one Marxist account of the Commune which admitted (in passing!) that the communal council was "overwhelmed" by suggestions from other bodies, the "sheer volume" of which "created difficulties" and it "found it hard to cope with the stream of people who crammed into the offices."[8]

Regardless of Lenin's assertions, the anarchists were right "to claim the Paris Commune as […] a collaboration of their

[7] Kropotkin, *Direct*, 446.

[8] Donny Gluckstein, *The Paris Commune: A Revolutionary Democracy* (London: Bookmarks, 2006), 47–8.

doctrine" and it is the Marxists who have "completely misunderstood its lessons". (385)

## Opportunism

Lenin's work was directed against two main opponents in the Marxist movement, the Opportunists and the Kautskyites. The former were the reformist wing of the Social Democratic parties and most associated with Eduard Bernstein. The latter were their main opponents in the Second International and most associated with Karl Kautsky. Until the outbreak of World War One Lenin considered himself a follower of Kautsky and repeatedly invoked his writings to show his Marxist orthodoxy (most infamously in *What is to be Done?* on how "socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without" by "the *bourgeois intelligentsia*"[9]).

Even as late as 1913 he praised the "fundamentals of parliamentary tactics" of German Social Democracy which was "implacable on questions of principle and always directed to the accomplishment of the final aim".[10] As is well-known, Lenin originally disbelieved news reports on German Social Democrat politicians voting for war credits in 1914 such was his faith in that party.

So while he was surprised that it had "turned out that in reality the German Social-Democratic Party was much more moderate and opportunist than it appeared to be" (390) anarchists were not for we had predicted and repeatedly denounced the obvious reformism in Social Democracy for decades.[11] Nor does Lenin discuss *why* "opportunism" developed in the first place, namely the Marxist tactic of *political* action by par-

[9] *The Lenin Anthology*, 28.

[10] *Collected Works* (*CW*) 19: 298.

[11] See Kropotkin's "Socialism and Politics" and other texts included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital.*



tudes to the masses in whose name their ruled. Lenin quotes Engels:

> "As the state is only a transitional institution which is used in the struggle, in the revolution, to hold down one's adversaries by force, it is sheer nonsense to talk of a 'free people's state'; so long as the proletariat still needs the state, it does not need it in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries" (356)

The problem is that in a State it is *not* the people who rule but rather those who make up the government and these, in turn, need bodies to implement their decisions. The transformation of the Red Army and the creation of the Cheka confirm anarchist predictions that the ruling party would need an armed force to defend it against the people. So Engels confused the need to defend a revolution with the ruling party supressing those who oppose it – including the proletariat. As Lenin explained in 1920:

> "Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."[43]

Who determines what these "elements" are? The party, of course. The party which was built on the assertion that the working class cannot reach socialist consciousness by its own efforts and which pledged to combat spontaneity as this reflected bourgeois influences. Thus "the Party, shall we say, ab-

[43] *CW* 42: 170.

the war and the intensity of proto-war communist measures" while "[c]onsidered in ideological terms there was little to distinguish the 'breathing space' (April-May 1918) from the war communism that followed." The "breathing space of the first months of 1920 after the victories over Kolchak and Denikin" saw their "intensification and the militarisation of labour" and "no serious attempt was made to review the aptness of war communist policies." Ideology "constantly impinged on the choices made at various points of the civil war" and so "Bolshevik authoritarianism cannot be ascribed simply to the Tsarist legacy or to adverse circumstances." Indeed, "in the soviets and in economic management the embryo of centralised and bureaucratic state forms had already emerged by mid-1918."[42]

Finally, there is a major irony in this standard defence of the Bolsheviks for Leninists usually (and falsely) attack anarchists for not recognising the need to defend a revolution. Yet here we have them rationalising Bolshevik authoritarianism by referring to something – Civil War – which they proclaim is an *inevitable* aspect of any revolution. So even if we ignore the awkward fact that before May 1918 the regime was well on its way to a one-party state-capitalist dictatorship, we can only conclude that if Leninism cannot experience what it (rightly) proclaims is inevitable without degenerating then it is best avoided.

## The State and the Masses

The privileged position of the party unspoken of in *The State and Revolution* – both in terms of ideology and in terms of holding and exercising power – played its role in Bolshevik atti-

in securing raw materials." (Malle, 101) While this may be dismissed as speculation based on a few examples, we cannot avoid recognising that turning the economy over to the bureaucracy coincided with the deepening of the economic crisis.

[42] Sakwa, 24, 27, 30, 96–7.



ties in elections rather than the anarchist one of *direct* action by workers' unions. As such, it was a striking confirmation of Bakunin's warnings that when "common workers" are sent "to Legislative Assemblies" the result is that the "worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois" for "men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them."[12] Indeed, "opportunism" existed in Social Democracy *from the start* – as can be seen from Lenin's admission that Bakunin's attacks were "justified" as the "people's state" was as "an absurdity" and "a departure from socialism" and so Engels sought to "rid" German Social Democracy "of opportunist prejudices" (357) concerning the State… in 1875![13]

So while much of Lenin's book is commentary upon numerous quotes from Marx and Engels and contrasting his interpretation to the then orthodox position, he fails to mention that he, like all Marxists before 1917, were "opportunists" in the sense of after having read Marx and Engels they concluded that "political action" would be used to capture "political power" which would then, in turn, be used to transform both State and society.[14]

[12] *The Basic Bakunin: Writings 1869–71* (Buffalo: Promethus Books, 1994.) 108. That there was no real possibility of electioneering in Tsarist Russia allowed the Bolsheviks to avoid the fate of their sister parties in the Second International.

[13] It may be the case that "every state is not 'free' and not a 'people's state'" but "Marx and Engels explained this repeatedly to their party comrades in the seventies" (323) only in *private* letters. Publicly, *Der Volksstaat* (*The People's State*) was the central organ of the *Social Democratic Workers Party of Germany* between 1869 and 1876 and Marx and Engels regularly contributed to it. So the "opportunist" notion of a *Volkstaat* was associated with the party most influenced by Marx and Engels. Moreover, "People's State" was used in the same way that modern-day Leninists use the term "Workers' State" to describe their new regime. Opportunism does not lie, surely, in the *words* used?

[14] As Kautsky noted in 1919 (*The Road to Power: political reflections on*

The reason for this is obvious as Lenin confuses smashing the State machine with smashing the State itself. He is right that "it was Marx who taught that the proletariat cannot simply win state power in the sense that the old state apparatus passes into new hands, but must smash this apparatus, must break it and replace it by a new one." (392) He is wrong in that Marx thought it would be achieved without first a securing universal suffrage and then a majority in the legislature. As such, when Lenin states that Kautsky "speaks of the winning of state power – and no more" and so "has chosen a formula which makes a concession to the opportunists, inasmuch as it admits the possibility of seizing power without destroying the state machine" (387) he misses the point. This can be seen quotes by Marx and Engels which Lenin himself provides and to which he feels the need to add commentary to what should be self-evident comments.[15]

Thus, after providing a long quote by Engels, Lenin has to add "Engels speaks here of the proletariat revolution 'abolishing' the *bourgeois* state, while the words about the state withering away refer to the remnants of the *proletarian* state *after* the socialist revolution" (322) when Engels himself makes no such distinction and just talks of the State. Similarly, he quotes Engels on how "one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power in the form of the democratic republic" and that this "is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the Great French Revolution has already shown" before feeling the need to add – presumably hoping his readers would not notice that Engels said no such thing – that "Engels realised here in a particularly

*growing into the revolution* [Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1996] 34, xlviii).

[15] This, by necessity, is just a selection of the evidence. See section H.3.10 of *An AFAQ* for further analysis. For a similar account but from a more-or-less orthodox Marxist perspective, see Binay Sarker and Adam Buick, *Marxism-Leninism – Poles Apart* (Memari: Avenel Press, 2012).



get things done.[39]Such local initiative came into conflict with orders from above but repeated demands for change were ignored for they "challenged" the "central directives of the party" which "approved the principles on which the *glavki* system was based" and "the maximum centralisation of production." So "the failure of *glavkism* did not bring about a reconsideration of the problems of economic organisation [...] On the contrary, the ideology of centralisation was reinforced."[40]

While the situation was pretty chaotic in early 1918, this does not prove that the factory committees' socialism was not the most efficient way of running things under the circumstances.[41] Unless, like the Bolsheviks, you have a dogmatic belief that centralisation is *always* more efficient and, moreover, a principle of socialism.

Lenin's vision of socialism was impoverished but very much in the orthodox Marxist tradition. So rather than being unclear on what socialism was, the Bolsheviks had very strong opinions on the subject and sought to implement them. The net effect of *The State and Revolution*'s vision of socialism was to build state-capitalism and make the economic crisis worse.

In short, "[f]rom the first days of Bolshevik power there was only a weak correlation between the extent of 'peace' and the mildness or severity of Bolshevik rule, between the intensity of

[39] Ironically, the "run-down of large-scale industry and the bureaucratic methods applied to production orders and financial estimates" made the supply system based on *glavki* "unreliable" and instead the Red Army "started relying directly" on craft co-operatives, a sector which "developed to a large extent because it involved a smaller amount of bureaucratic procedure." (Malle, 477–8)

[40] Malle *The Economic Organisation of War Communism, 1918–1921*, 271, 275.

[41] Rates of "output and productivity began to climb steadily after" January 1918, "[i]n some factories, production doubled or tripled in the early months of 1918" and "[m]any of the reports explicitly credited the factory committees for these increases." (Sirianni, 109) There is "evidence that until late 1919, some factory committees performed managerial tasks successfully. In some regions factories were still active thanks to their workers' initiatives

> tral distribution of output, in accordance with any priority ranking [...] materials were provided to factories in arbitrary proportions: in some places they accumulated, whereas in others there was a shortage. Moreover, the length of the procedure needed to release the products increased scarcity at given moments, since products remained stored until the centre issued a purchase order on behalf of a centrally defined customer. Unused stock coexisted with acute scarcity. The centre was unable to determine the correct proportions among necessary materials and eventually to enforce implementation of the orders for their total quantity. The gap between theory and practice was significant."[36]

To ensure centralism, customers had to go via a central orders committee, which would then past the details to the appropriate *glavki* and, unsurprisingly, it was "unable to cope with these enormous tasks" and the "shortcomings of the central administrations and *glavki* increased together with the number of enterprises under their control".[37] The "centre lacked basic information about the performance of the economy" and "lacked the knowledge on which to judge the costs or effects of the policies it proposed." Elementary information about the state of production "could not be gathered" and "[l]acking information about the availability of fuel, raw materials, and labour and about the state of repair of equipment, the *glavki* issued blind production orders."[38]

Faced with the realities rather than rhetoric of centralised, top-down structures even the most committed Bolshevik ended up acting independently of the formal structures just to

[36] Malle, 233.

[37] Malle, 232, 250.

[38] Remington, 154.



striking form the fundamental idea which runs through all of Marx's works, namely, that the democratic republic is the nearest approach to the dictatorship of the proletariat." (360). Thus "the specific form" becomes "the nearest approach"![16]

Engels repeatedly suggested that "the republic" is "the ready-made political form for the future rule of the proletariat" which in France "is already in being"[17] and did so in text Lenin quotes:

> "So, then, a unified republic [...] From 1792 to 1798 each French department, each commune [*Gemeinde*], enjoyed complete self-government on the American model, and this is what we too must have. How self-government is to be organised and how we can manage, without a bureaucracy has been shown to us by America and the first French Republic, and is being shown even today by Australia, Canada and the other English colonies." (362)

There is no mention of the Paris Commune *at all* in Engels' critique of the draft of the Erfurt Programme which is significant given Lenin proclaims that it "cannot be ignored; for it is with the *opportunist* views of the Social-Democrats on questions of *state*organisation that this criticism is mainly concerned." (358)

This position is consistent with Marx's comments on "smashing" the State machine which Lenin thinks is so important. This is because it is possible to argue that political action can be used to capture political power and that the first action of the victorious party is to smash the State bureaucracy – as Engels

[16] Julius Martov, leader of the Menshevik-Internationalists, noted this in his important critique of Lenin ("Decomposition or Conquest of the State", *The State and The Socialist Revolution* [New York: International Review, 1938], 40–1).

[17] *MECW* 50: 276.

confirmed in an 1884 letter when asked to clarify this precise point by Bernstein:

> "It is simply a question of showing that the victorious proletariat must first refashion the old bureaucratic, administrative centralised state power before it can use it for its own purposes: whereas all bourgeois republicans since 1848 inveighed against this machinery so long as they were in the opposition, but once they were in the government they took it over without altering it and used it partly against the reaction but still more against the proletariat."[18]

Which reflects Marx's earlier comment (quoted by Lenin) on the "executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organisation, with its vast and ingenious state machinery, with a host of officials numbering half a million, besides an army of another half million, this appalling parasitic body [...] All revolutions perfected this machine instead of smashing it." (329) So unlike anarchists – who, from Proudhon onwards, had argued that it was "inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat"[19] – Marxists had viewed the bourgeois State as not only able to be captured but reformed in the interests of the working class.

The fundamental difference between the Opportunists and Kautskyites was that the former simply wished the party to revise the rhetoric used to bring it in line with the party's (reformist) practice while the latter insisted that the rhetoric remain revolutionary. However, both utilised the same tactics and aimed for the same thing – a Social Democratic majority. The former wished to use the existing State machine to imple-

[18] *MECW* 47: 74; This perspective is reflected a passage in a draft of Marx's *The Civil War in France* (*MECW* 22: 533).

[19] Proudhon, 226.



So rather than being driven by civil war, "for the leadership, the principle of maximum centralisation of authority served more than expedience. It consistently resurfaced as the image of a peacetime political system as well."[32] This was to be expected for Lenin had long argued that centralised, top-down organisation were the model for the revolutionary State and, once in power, he did not disappoint.

However, by its very nature centralism, cannot help but produce bureaucracy – how else will the central bodies gather and process the needed information and implement its decisions? Thus "red tape and vast administrative offices typified Soviet reality" for as the "functions of the state expanded, so did the bureaucracy" and so "following the revolution the process of institutional proliferation reached unprecedented heights."[33]

If the Paris Commune had been "overwhelmed" by the demands placed on it, the new institutions covering a far greater territorial and functional areas experienced for worse. Thus the Commissariat of Finance was "not only bureaucratically cumbersome, but [it] involved mountainous accounting problems" and "the various offices of the Sovnarkhoz and commissariat structure [were] literally swamped with 'urgent' delegations and submerged in paperwork".[34] The Vesenka "was deluged with work of an ad hoc character", demands "for fuel and supplies piled up" and factories "demanded instructions". Its presidium "scarcely knew what its tasks were".[35] In short:

> "The most evident shortcoming [...] was that it did not ensure central allocation of resources and cen-

"The revolutionary tribunal and the guillotine could not make up for the lack of a constructive communist theory," Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, 499.

[32] Remington, 91.

[33] Richard Sakwa, *Soviet Communists in Power: a study of Moscow during the Civil War, 1918–21* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), 190–1.

[34] William G. Rosenberg, "The Social Background to Tsektran," 357.

[35] Remington, 61–2.

economic construction on the basis of an intensification of War Communism policies."[29]

Even such abominations as the "militarisation of labour" were defended not as desperate measures provoked by necessity – which, while wrong, would at least indicate some awareness of what socialism meant – but *ideologically* in terms of appropriate tools for building socialism. Thus Trotsky as well as defending the "substitution" of "the dictatorship of the Soviets" by "the dictatorship of the party" also defended one-man management ("I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully") and the militarisation of labour ("the only solution to economic difficulties from the point of view of both principle and of practice is to treat the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour power [...] and to introduce strict order into the work of its registration, mobilisation and utilisation.").[30] Such perspectives were helped by Engels' "On Authority" and the reference to "industrial armies" in the *Communist Manifesto*. They failed.[31]

[29] Jonathan Aves, *Workers Against Lenin: Labour Protest and the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996) 37.

[30] *Terrorism and Communism: A Reply to Karl Kautsky* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1961), 109, 162–3, 135.

[31] Trotsky applied his ideas on the railway workers which led to the "ignorance of distance and the inability to respond properly to local circumstances [...] 'I have no instructions' became all the more effective as a defensive and self-protective rationalisation as party officials vested with unilateral power insisted all their orders be strictly obeyed. Cheka ruthlessness instilled fear, but repression [...] only impaired the exercise of initiative that daily operations required." William G. Rosenberg, "The Social Background to Tsektran," *Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989), Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), 369. Militarisation was imposed in September 1920 which was followed by a disastrous collapse of the railway network in the winter.



ment reforms to the system and saw no need to smash that machinery or quickly transform the system. The latter remained true to Marx and argued that to secure the proletariat as the ruling class, parliament would have to smash that machine in order to replace capitalism with socialism.

Given that the Paris Commune had utilised a part of the current State – the Parisian municipal council – to abolish the State machine, it is easy to see why Lenin's interpretation of Marx and Engels took until 1917 to be formulated, particularly given their well-known support for electioneering and opposition to anarchist calls to smash the State and replace it with a new form of social organisation based on federations of workers' groupings.

Before turning to this, we must note that while finding the time to berate Bernstein for having "more than once repeated the vulgar bourgeois jeers at 'primitive' democracy" (340) and how he "combats the ideas of 'primitive' democracy" – "binding mandates, unpaid officials, impotent central representative bodies, etc." – to "prove" that this "is unsound" and "refers to the experience of the British trade unions, as interpreted by the Webbs" (394) he failed to note how he refers to the same book in *What is to be Done?* to also prove "the absurdity of such a conception of democracy".[20]

## Anarchism

If Lenin's account of Marxism leaves much to be desired, this is nothing compared to the nonsense he inflicts on anarchism. To describe Lenin's understanding of Anarchism as superficial would be generous. He summarises what he considers the differences between Marxists and anarchists:

[20] *The Lenin Anthology*, 90.

> "(1) The former, while aiming at the complete abolition of the state, recognise that this aim can only be achieved after classes have been abolished by the socialist revolution, as the result of the establishment of socialism, which leads to the withering away of the state. The latter want to abolish the state completely overnight, not understanding the conditions under which the state can be abolished. (2) The former recognise that after the proletariat has won political power it must completely destroy the old state machine and replace it by a new one consisting of an organisation of the armed workers, after the type of the Commune. The latter, while insisting on the destruction of the state machine, have a very vague idea of what the proletariat will put in its place and how it will use its revolutionary power. The anarchists even deny that the revolutionary proletariat should use the state power, they reject its revolutionary dictatorship. (3) The former demand that the proletariat be trained for revolution by utilising the present state. The anarchists reject this." (392)

First, regardless of Lenin's suggestions of "overnight" revolutions, anarchists had never viewed social revolution in that way. Quite the reverse, as anarchists have *always* stressed that revolutions are difficult and take time as well as *explicitly* rejecting the notion of "one-day" revolutions. Kropotkin argued that while it may be possible to "topple and change a government in one day", a revolution, "if it is to achieve a tangible outcome […] *takes three or four years of revolutionary upheaval*."[21] Then working class would be in a position to finally smash the State and capitalism its revolt had weakened and so be free to start constructing a new society.

[21] Kropotkin, *Direct*, 553; also see sections H.3.5 and I.2.2 of *AFAQ*.



over half its budget consumed by personnel costs by the end of 1919.[26]

April 1920 saw what appeared to be victory against the Whites and with peace the Bolsheviks started to concentrate on building socialism. Whatever limited forms of workers' control or management remained were replaced by one-man management and so the perspective of 1918 continued with Lenin in 1920 stressing that "domination of the proletariat consists in the fact that the landowners and capitalists have been deprived of their property" The "victorious proletariat has abolished property" and "therein lies its domination as a class. The prime thing is the question of property."[27] Workers' self-management of production – in other words, basic economic power – was considered as irrelevant.

Looking back at April 1918, Lenin reiterated his position ("Dictatorial powers and one-man management are not contradictory to socialist democracy.") while also stressing that this was not forced upon the Bolsheviks by civil war. Discussing how, again, the civil war had ended and it was time to build socialism he argued that the "whole attention of the Communist Party and the Soviet government is centred on peaceful economic development, on problems of the dictatorship and of one-man management […] When we tackled them for the first time in 1918, there was no civil war and no experience to speak of." So it was "not only experience" of civil war, argued Lenin "but something more profound" that has "induced us now, as it did two years ago, to concentrate all our attention on labour discipline."[28] The Bolsheviks "took victory as a sign of the correctness of its ideological approach and set about the task of

the facts." (Schapiro, 355)

[26] Remington, 153–4.

[27] *CW* 30: 456.

[28] *CW* 30: 503–4.

letariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."[24]

It is within the context of secure one-party rule that we must view the fate of the opposition parties. The Bolsheviks banned the Mensheviks from the soviets in June 1918 and rescinded it in November 1918 and they, like other left-wing parties, experienced periods of tolerance and repression.[25] This reflected a general pattern – when the civil war was at its most intense, the Bolsheviks legalised opposition parties for they knew they could be counted upon to work with the regime against the White threat. Once the danger had receded, they were once again banned – so they could not influence nor benefit from the inevitable return of popular discontent and protest which accompanied these victories against the Whites. Unsurprisingly, then, oppositional parties – like factions within the party – were finally banned *after* the end of the Civil War.

Economically, the same building upon the authoritarian tendencies already present before the civil war continued. Faced with the predictable resistance by the capitalists, at the end of June 1918 wide-scale nationalisation was decreed – although many local soviets had already decided to do this under workforce pressure. This simply handed the economy to the ever-growing bureaucracy – the apparatus of the Vesenka grew from 6,000 in September 1918 to 24,000 by the end of 1920, with

[24] *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress of the Communist International, 1920* (New York: Pathfinder, 1991) 1: 151–2; Lenin made similar comments in the work *Left-Wing Communism*written for that Congress (*The Lenin Anthology*, 567–8, 571–3)

[25] Space excludes a detailed discussion of Menshevik and other opposition to the Bolsheviks beyond noting that the Menshevik's official position was to oppose armed rebellions in favour of winning a majority in the soviets (any party members who participated in such revolts were swiftly expelled): "The charge that the Mensheviks were not prepared to remain within legal limits is part of the Bolsheviks' case; it does not survive an examination of



The element of truth in Lenin's statement is that anarchists *do* reject the Marxist notion that we need a State to rebuild and defend society after a successful revolution. This is because of our differing analyses of what the State is. Both agree that the current and all previous States are instruments of class rule, that class being the minority of oppressors and exploiters who have monopolised social wealth. Marxists think that a State – whether a suitably transformed republic (Kautsky, Lenin before 1917) or a new soviet-State (Lenin in 1917) – can be the instrument of the majority, of the working class, for it is simply "a special force for the suppression of a particular class". (340) Anarchists reject this analysis and argue that the State institution is marked by certain structures which allow it to do its task and that the State develops its own interests. The "dictatorship of the proletariat" would soon become the "dictatorship *over* the proletariat."

This is because the State is an "organisation of hierarchical centralisation" and is "necessarily hierarchical, authoritarian – or it ceases to be the State." It is "the absorption of the whole national life, concentrated into a pyramid of functionaries."[22] This structure did not appear by accident. What is striking about Lenin's account of the State is that he never, ever wonders *why* this social structure has taken the form it has. The bourgeois State is centralised and the proletarian State will likewise be – and any attempts to suggest Marx was a federalist are dismissed (albeit, correctly!) for he "upheld democratic centralism, the republic – one and indivisible." (361)

Yet hierarchical and centralised structures are needed for a minority to rule. They exclude the masses from participation in social life. As Proudhon argued:

> "And who benefits from this regime of unity? The people? No, the upper classes […] Unity […] is

[22] Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchy* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK

> quite simply a form of bourgeois exploitation under the protection of bayonets. Yes, political unity, in the great States, is bourgeois: the positions which it creates, the intrigues which it causes, the influences which it cherishes, all that is bourgeois and goes to the bourgeois."[23]

The centralised, hierarchical, state is "the cornerstone of bourgeois despotism and exploitation".[24] Under the rising bourgeoisie, Kropotkin noted, "the State was the sole judge" which meant that "all the local, insignificant disputes [...] piled up in the form of documents in the offices" and "parliament was literally inundated by thousands of these minor local squabbles. It then took thousands of functionaries in the capital – most of them corruptible – to read, classify, evaluate all these, to pronounce on the smallest detail" and "the flood [of issues] always rose!"[25] The same process would be at work in the new so-called semi-State as it, too, was centralised and so had "a whole new administrative network in order to extend its writ and enforce obedience".[26] This was why anarchists sought to decentralise decision making away from one central body into federations of workplace and community associations and wondered why Marxists had "adopted the ideal of the *Jacobin State* when this ideal had been designed from the viewpoint of the bourgeois, in direct opposition to the egalitarian and communist tendencies of the people which had arisen during the [French] Revolution".[27]

Press, 2018), 199, 227, 365.

[23] *La fédération et l'unité en Italie* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1862), 27–8.

[24] Proudhon, 33.

[25] Kropotkin, *Modern*, 269.

[26] Kropotkin, *Direct*, 509.

[27] Kropotkin, *Modern*, 366: "Attacks upon the central authorities, stripping these of their prerogatives, de-centralisation, dispersing authority would have amounted to abandoning its affairs to the people and would have run the risk of a genuinely popular revolution. Which is why the bourgeoisie



successful fabrication of a large majority".[22] Deprived of their democratic majority the Left SRs assassinated the German ambassador to provoke a revolutionary war with Germany. The Bolsheviks labelled this an uprising against the soviets and the Left-SRs joined the Mensheviks and Right-SRs in being made illegal.

So by July 1918, the regime was a de facto Bolshevik dictatorship. It took some months for this reality to be reflected in the rhetoric. The ex-anarchist Victor Serge recalled in the 1930s that "the degeneration of Bolshevism" was apparent "at the start of 1919" for he "was horrified to read an article" by Zinoviev "on the monopoly of the party in power."[23] By 1920 Zinoviev was proclaiming this conclusion to the assembled revolutionaries of the world at the Second Congress of the Communist International:

> "Today, people like Kautsky come along and say that in Russia you do not have the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party. They think this is a reproach against us. Not in the least! We have a dictatorship of the working class and that is precisely why we also have a dictatorship of the Communist Party. The dictatorship of the Communist Party is only a function, an attribute, an expression of the dictatorship of the working class [...] the dictatorship of the pro-

[22] Rabinowitch, 396, 288, 442, 308; The Bolsheviks "allowed so-called committees of poor peasants to be represented at the congress" and this "blatant gerrymandering ensured a Bolshevik majority." (Geoffrey Swain, *The Origins of the Russian Civil War*[London/New York: Longman, 1996], 176).

[23] *The Serge-Trotsky Papers* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), 188; it must be noted that Serge kept his horror well-hidden throughout this period – and well into the 1930s (see my "The Worst of the Anarchists", *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* No. 61).

argued, caused the degeneration of regime from the ideals of *The State and Revolution*.

Yet there is a good reason for this: the usurpation of soviet power by executives, abolition of democracy in the armed forces, "dictatorial" one-man management, creation of a highly centralised economic structure based on the institutions inherited from Tsarism, packing and disbanding of soviets, expanding bureaucracy, and so on – all these occurred *before* Civil War broke-out in late May 1918.

*The State and Revolution* made clear that Lenin – unlike anarchists – expected the Revolution to be an easy affair, with minimal resistance. His hopes seemed justified initially. As he noted in March 1918, "victory was achieved" with "extraordinary ease" and the "revolution was a continuous triumphal march in the first months."[21] Yet signs of authoritarianism – some consistent with *The State and Revolution*, some not – were present from the first day and increased during the next six months. The outbreak of civil war in late May 1918 merely accelerated them.

The Bolsheviks had already packed and disbanded soviets at the local level for some months before acting on the national level at the Fifth All-Russian Soviet Congress in July 1918. With the Mensheviks and Right-SRs banned from the soviets, popular disenchantment with Bolshevik rule was expressed by voting for the Left-Social-Revolutionaries (SRs). The Bolsheviks ensured their majority in the congress and so a Bolshevik government by "electoral fraud [which] gave the Bolsheviks a huge majority of congress delegates" by means of "roughly 399 Bolsheviks delegates whose right to be seated was challenged by the Left SR minority in the congress's credentials commission." Without these dubious delegates, the Left SRs and SR Maximalists would have outnumbered the Bolsheviks by around 30 delegates and this ensured "the Bolshevik's

[21] *CW* 27: 88–9.



Lenin confuses social organisation with the State and misses the point by saying we "cannot imagine democracy, even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions, but we can and must imagine democracy without parliamentarism" (343–4) for while *any* organisation requires delegates to coordinate decisions it is a mistake to confuse this with representative – and so centralised – government. So if "[u]nder socialism *all* will govern in turn and will soon become accustomed to no one governing" (395) under Anarchism, rather than having a series of rulers, all would participate in decision making and the "centralistic, bureaucratic and military organisation" of the State which operates "from the top down and from centre to periphery" will be replaced "with a federal organisation" of associations and communes "from the bottom up, from periphery to centre" with "elective officials answerable to the people, and with arming of the nation".[28]

The question is whether these elected bodies are focused on specific tasks at appropriate levels or whether they are, like Parliaments, cover all social matters at the centre. In both cases "representative" institutions remain in the sense that specific individuals are elected to specific bodies but Lenin confused the matter by saying the "way out of parliamentarism is not, of course, the abolition of representative institutions and the elective principle, but the conversion of the representative institutions from talking shops into 'working' bodies." (342) This is only part of what is needed as the question of centralisation is key for it vastly decreases popular participation and vastly increases bureaucratic tendencies.

For Lenin, the "exploiting classes need political rule to maintain exploitation, i.e., in the selfish interests of an insignificant

is out to strengthen the central government still further" and why the working class, "not about to abdicate their rights to the care of the few, will seek some new form of organisation that allows them to manage their affairs for themselves". (Kropotkin, *Direct*, 232, 228)

[28] Bakunin, *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Edin-

minority against the vast majority of all people" while the "exploited classes need political rule in order to completely abolish all exploitation" (327) anarchists agree with the first part but disagree with the second. Political rule – a State – *is* needed for a minority class to dominate society and is structured appropriately (hierarchical, centralised, top-down). It is not needed – indeed, defeats the aim – when we are talking about formerly exploited classes ("the vast majority") running society simply because it is not structured to allow that. By creating a new centralised social structure, Marxists create the conditions for the birth of a new ruling class – *the bureaucracy*. This is why anarchists reject the notion of using a State to build socialism:

> "the State, with its hierarchy of functionaries and the weight of its historical traditions, could only delay the dawning of a new society freed from monopolies and exploitation […] what means can the State provide to abolish this monopoly that the working class could not find in its own strength and groups? […] what advantages could the State provide for abolishing these same [class] privileges? Could its governmental machine, developed for the creation and upholding of these privileges, now be used to abolish them? Would not the new function require new organs? And these new organs would they not have to be created by the workers themselves, in *their* unions, *their* federations, completely outside the State?"[29]

Lenin is also keen to confuse the need to defend a revolution with the State and quotes from a polemic Marx addressed to the reformist mutualists, generalising it to all anarchists:

burgh/San Francisco: AK Press 2005), Daniel Guérin (ed.), 162.

[29] Kropotkin, *Modern*, 164.



> powers from the point of view of the specific tasks of the present moment, it must be said that large-scale machine industry – which is precisely the material source, the productive source, the foundation of socialism – calls for absolute and strict unity of will, which directs the joint labours of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of people […] But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one […] *unquestioning subordination* to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of processes organised on the pattern of large-scale machine industry. […] revolution demands – precisely in the interests of its development and consolidation, precisely in the interests of socialism – that the people *unquestioningly obey the single will* of the leaders of labour."[19]

This was part of "our task" which was "to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare *no effort* in copying it and not to shrink from adopting *dictatorial* methods to hasten the copying of it" and prefigured in *The State and Revolution* (as Lenin himself latter stressed against opponents within the Party).[20]

## The State and Civil War

A standard response to the anarchist critique of the Bolshevik regime by modern-day Leninists is that it fails to mention the terrible Civil War and imperialist invasion. This, it will be

[19] *CW* 27: 267–9.

[20] *CW* 27: 340, 341, 354; Also see Maurice Brinton's classic *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control* for an excellent discussion of this subject (Maurice Brinton, *For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* [Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2004]).

> vest both managerial *and* control powers in organs of the state which were subordinate to the central authorities, and formed by them."[16]

Indeed, it is "likely that the arguments for centralisation in economic policy, which were prevalent among Marxists, determined the short life of the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control."[17] Moreover, attempts by the factory committees to organise themselves were systematically hindered by the Bolsheviks using their controlled unions to prevent, amongst other things, a planned All-Russian Congress.

Lenin initially rejected calls for nationalisation and left the capitalists in place, subject to "workers' control" (or rather supervision) by the workers' State. Direct workers' control of production was not seen as essential and, indeed, was rejected. By April 1918, faced with the growing economic crisis which Bolshevik power had not improved, Lenin turned on the factory committees by channelling Engels article *"On Authority"* – with its confusion of agreement with authoritarianism, co-operation with coercion – and demanded "[o]bedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the dictators elected or appointed by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers."[18] In short, *capitalist* relations in production in which workers were once again mere order-takers:

> "Firstly, the question of principle, namely, is the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers, in general compatible with the fundamental principles of Soviet government? [...] concerning the significance of individual dictatorial

[16] Thomas F. Remington, *Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia: Ideology and Industrial Organisation 1917–1921* (London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984) 38.

[17] Malle, 94.

[18] *CW* 27: 316.



> "Marx chooses the sharpest and clearest way of stating his case against the anarchists: After overthrowing the yoke of the capitalists, should the workers 'lay down their arms', or use them against the capitalists in order to crush their resistance? But what is the systematic use of arms by one class against another if not a 'transient form' of state?" (353)

So, according to Marx and Engels, the anarchists urged the working class to rise in insurrection against the bourgeoisie and its State and, once victorious, then simply put down its arms? It is difficult to take this seriously – particularly as it confuses defence of a revolution (of freedom) with the State. Lenin, like Marx and Engels, join those who "believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the *freedom* of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas!"[30]

Lenin suggests that the "armed workers who proceed to form a militia involving the entire population" is "a more democratic state machine". (383) Yet if the State were simply this then there would be no disagreement between Anarchism and Marxism:

> "Immediately after established governments have been overthrown, communes will have to reorganise themselves along revolutionary lines [...] In order to defend the revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. But no commune can defend itself in isolation. So it will be necessary to radiate revolution outward,

[30] Errico Malatesta, *Anarchy* (London: Freedom Press, 2001) 42–3.

> to raise all of its neighbouring communes in revolt [...] and to federate with them for common defence."[31]

Lenin's innovation was to move away from the orthodox Marxist position on the State towards the anarchist position that socialism must be built by the workers' themselves using the organisations they themselves create in the struggle against capitalism. However, he linked this to a continued Marxist prejudice in favour of centralised structures and so his assertion that the new regime "is no longer the state proper" (340) was simply not true for in a centralised structure power rests at the top, in the hands of a minority – with its own (class) interests.[32] So when Lenin argued that "we shall fight for the complete destruction of the old state machine, in order that the armed proletariat itself *may become the government* (396) anarchists simply note that in a centralised structure it would be the Marxist party leadership who would become the government, *not* the armed proletariat:

> "By popular government the marxians mean government of the people by means of a small number of representatives elected through universal suffrage [...] government of the vast majority of the masses of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the marxians argue, will be made up of workers. Yes, to be sure, of former workers who, as soon as they become the people's governors and representatives, will stop being workers and will begin to look down upon the proletarian world from the heights of the State: they will then represent, not the people, but themselves and their

[31] Michael Bakunin, *No Gods, No Masters*, 164; also see section H.2.1 of *AFAQ*.

[32] See section H.3.9 of *AFAQ*.



## The State and Socialism

Throughout 1917 the Bolsheviks had argued that the economic problems facing Russia were the fault of the Provisional Government as it was bourgeois in origin and so unwilling to take the measures needed against (bourgeois) speculators and vested interests. The creation of a new "soviet" power would quickly end the problems. This proved to be optimistic in the extreme. The economic crisis continued once the Bolsheviks seized power and got worse as Bolshevik ideology started to play its role.

The Bolsheviks did what Lenin had indicated in *The State and Revolution* – build "socialism" on the structures created by capitalism. In December 1917, the VTsIK decreed the creation of the Supreme Council of the National Economy (Vesenka). This "was an expression of the principle of centralisation and control from above which was peculiar to the Marxist ideology." This body utilised the "chief committees" (*glavki*) formed during the war by the Tsarist regime and were viewed by the Bolsheviks "to provide good grounds and prerequisites for nationalisation and price control" and so "were kept on and assigned increasing functions." More were created and these "became the foundation of the organisation of production" based on "a ready-made institutional framework for further policies of coordination and control."[15] Alternatives based on workers' own organisations were rejected:

> "On three occasions in the first months of Soviet power, the [factory] committee leaders sought to bring their model into being. At each point the party leadership overruled them. The result was to

with the complete victory of the bureaucrats under Stalin who then uses the repressive techniques perfected under Lenin against the left-wing opposition and the working class *within the party itself*.

[15] Malle, 95, 45–6, 218.

Such activities would have been hard with a State dependent on the armed people – but by then the Bolsheviks had a regular army and political police force to do their bidding. The Bolshevik regime confirmed Engels description of the State as quoted by Lenin:

> "the establishment of a public power which no longer directly coincides with the population organising itself as an armed force. This special, public power is necessary because a self-acting armed organisation of the population has become impossible since the split into classes…. This public power exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons, and institutions of coercion of all kinds" (316)

The irony is that it was Engels' own ideology which produced this as the classes into which society had split was the working class and the new party-bureaucratic ruling class. As anarchists predicted, function and organ are inseparable and the centralised State produced around it a new minority class. The State did not begin to "wither away" but rather enlarged and strengthened. If, "according to Marx, the proletariat needs only a state which is withering away, i.e., a state so constituted that it begins to wither away immediately, and cannot but wither away." (326) then Lenin's regime failed to provide it.[14]

[14] This is not to suggest that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were happy with the bureaucracy they failed to anticipate. Quite the reverse as they denounced it repeatedly while flailing around for some kind of solution. Yet blinded by simplistic Marxist notions, they could think of nothing better than organisational and police methods – new bodies are organised to oversee the existing bureaucratic ones, only to become bureaucratic themselves; other bodies are enlarged or workers added to them, only for the problems to worsen; more centralisation is implemented, resulting in more bureaucracy. The conflict with the bureaucracy is finally resolved after Lenin's death –



> ambitions to govern it. Anyone who queries that does not know human nature."[33]

In a centralised, "one and indivisible" republic electing, mandating and recalling become increasingly meaningless – it would require millions of electors at the base across the country to simultaneously act in the same manner to have any impact. This means that there is substantial space for the interests of the State to diverge from the people and, as Bakunin warned, "the State cannot be sure of its own self-preservation without an armed force to defend it against its own *internal enemies*, against the discontent of its own people."[34]

Which is why, while recognising the need for insurrection and defence of the revolution, anarchists seek to abolish the State and replace it with a social structure more appropriate for building socialism – for "whenever a new economic form emerges in the life of a nation – when serfdom, for example, came to replace slavery, and later on wage-labour for serfdom – a new form of political grouping always had to develop" and so "economic emancipation will be accomplished by smashing the old political forms represented by the State. Man will be forced to find new forms of organisation for the social functions that the State apportioned between its functionaries."[35]

Second, the claim that anarchists have only a "vague" notion of what to replace the State with is simply wrong. Proclaiming that anarchists argue that we "must think only of destroying the old state machine" and "it is no use probing into the concrete lessons of earlier proletarian revolutions and analysing what to put in the place of what has been destroyed, and how", (395) flies in the face of the many articles and books in which anarchists did precisely that. To quote Bakunin:

[33] Bakunin, *No Gods, No Masters*, 195.

[34] *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973) 265.

[35] Kropotkin, *Modern*, 169.

> "Workers, no longer count on anyone but yourselves [...] Abstain from all participation in bourgeois radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The basis of that organisation is entirely given: the workshops and the federation of the workshops; the creation of funds for resistance, instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation not just nationally, but internationally. The creation of Chambers of Labour [...] the liquidation of the State and of bourgeois society [...] Anarchy, that it to say the true, the open popular revolution [...] organisation, from top to bottom and from the circumference to the centre"[36]

The "Chambers of Labour" were federations of local unions grouped by territory and Bakunin's visions of revolution predicted the workers' councils of 1905 and 1917. Likewise, Kropotkin argued that "independent Communes for the *territorial* groupings, and vast federations of trade unions for groupings *by social functions* – the two interwoven and providing support to each to meet the needs of society – allowed the anarchists to conceptualise in a real, concrete, way the possible organisation of a liberated society"[37] – based on an analysis of both the workers' movement and the Paris Commune as well as the history of the State

Yet Lenin claimed that "anarchists dismissed the question of political forms altogether"! (349)

Similarly, he was wrong to proclaim that if the workers and peasants "organise themselves quite freely in communes, and *unite* the action of all the communes in striking at capital, in crushing the resistance of the capitalists, and in transferring the privately-owned railways, factories, land and so on to the

[36] "Letter to Albert Richard", *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* No. 62, 18.

[37] Kropotkin, *Modern*, 164.



vent re-elections where Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries had gained majorities."[12]

As well as delaying elections and disbanding by force soviets elected with non-Bolshevik majorities, the Bolsheviks also took to packing soviets with representatives of organisations they controlled. So, for example, in Petrograd the Bolshevik Soviet confirmed new regulations "to help offset possible weaknesses" in their "electoral strength in factories." The "most significant change" was the "numerically decisive representation" given "to agencies in which the Bolsheviks had overwhelming strength, among them the Petrograd Trade Union Council, individual trade unions, factory committees in closed enterprises, district soviets, and district non-party workers' conferences." This ensured that "[o]nly 260 of roughly 700 deputies in the new soviet were to be elected in factories, which guaranteed a large Bolshevik majority in advance" and so the Bolsheviks "contrived a majority" in the new Soviet long before gaining 127 of the 260 factory delegates. This, moreover, ignores the repression of opposition parties and press on the results. Overall, the Bolshevik election victory "was highly suspect, even on the shop floor."[13]

So much for Lenin's promise of "sovereign, all-powerful Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies". (393)

[12] Israel Getzler, *Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1967) 179; ; Vladimir Brovkin, "The Mensheviks' Political Comeback: The Elections to the Provincial City Soviets in Spring 1918," *The Russian Review* 42, 1; Leonard Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy : Political Opposition in the Soviet State: The First Phase, 1917–1922* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 191; Silvana Malle, *The Economic Organisation of War Communism, 1918–1921*([Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 366–7; Duval, 13–14.

[13] Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power: The first year of Soviet rule in Petrograd* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007) 248–252; also see Vladimir N. Brovkin, *The Mensheviks After October: Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 238–43.

tion of "[a]bolishing the bureaucracy at once, everywhere and completely, is out of the question" and "a utopia" (344) but to massively *increase* that bureaucracy is something else – particularly when the opposite had been so confidently proclaimed.[10]

As well as an ever-increasing bureaucracy, the new "semi-State" also gained "special bodies" of armed forces. On 20th of December 1917 the Sovnarkom decreed the formation of a political police force, the Cheka. For all the talk of "smashing" the old State machine, the Cheka's first headquarters was at Gorokhovaia 2 which had housed the Tsar's notorious security service the Okhrana. In March 1918, Trotsky replaced the militia with a regular army by eliminating the soldier's committees and elected officers: "the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree."[11]

This shifting of power territorially to the centre and functionally to executives, the rise of a "new" bureaucracy and specialised armed forces – while all expected by anarchists – did not automatically mean dictatorship as other parties could, in theory, win elections to soviets, become the majority and replace the executives. This is precisely what the Mensheviks decided to do and they achieved significant success by the spring of 1918 as the working class was "becoming increasingly disillusioned with the Bolshevik regime, so much so that in many places the Bolsheviks felt constrained to dissolve Soviets or pre-

[10] As Kropotkin noted, "It is often thought that it would be easy for a revolution to economise in the administration by reducing the number of officials. This was certainly not the case during the Revolution of 1789–1793, which with each year extended the functions of the State, over instruction, judges paid by the State, the administration paid out of the taxes, an immense army, and so forth." *The Great French Revolution* (Montreal/New York: Black Rose Books, 1989) 440

[11] *How the Revolution Armed* (London: New Park Publications, 1979) 1: 47.



*entire* nation, to the whole of society" then that would "be the most consistent democratic centralism". (348) In fact it would be *federalism*:

> "All productive capital and instruments of labour are to be confiscated for the benefit of toilers' associations [...] the Alliance of all labour associations [...] will constitute the Commune [...] there will be a standing federation of the barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council [... made up of] delegates [...] invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times [...] all provinces, communes and associations [... will] delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all [...] invested with binding mandated and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces"[38]

Unsurprisingly then, it was Kropotkin and not Lenin who in 1905 saw the soviets as the means of both fighting and replacing the State as well as comparing them to the Paris Commune. Thus "the Council of workers [...] were appointed by the workers themselves — just like the insurrectional Commune of August 10, 1792." The council "completely recalls [...] the Central Committee which preceded the Paris Commune in 1871 and it is certain that workers across the country must organise themselves on this model [...] these councils represent the revolutionary strength of the working class. [...] Let no one come to proclaim to us that the workers of the Latin peoples, by preaching the general strike and direct action, were going down the wrong path. [...] A new force is thus constituted by the strike: the force of workers asserting themselves for the first time and putting in motion the lever of any revolution – direct action."

[38] Bakunin, *No Gods, No Masters*, 181.

The "urban workers [...] imitating the rebellious peasants [...] will likely be asked to put their hands on all that is necessary to live and produce. Then they can lay in the cities the initial foundations of the communist commune."[39]

In contrast, the Bolsheviks in 1905 could "find nothing better to do than to present the Soviet with an ultimatum: immediately adopt a Social-Democratic program or disband."[40] Nor did the Bolsheviks seek to transform or extend the revolution from bourgeois to socialist aims – unlike the anarchists. Given this, perhaps it was for the best that the October Revolution meant Lenin never wrote the second part of *The State and Revolution* which was to deal with the events of 1905. (397)

All of which makes a mockery of Lenin's assertion that "Anarchism has given nothing even approximating true answers to the concrete political questions: Must the old state machine be smashed? And what should be put in its place?" (385) Anarchism had advocated workers' councils as a means of both fighting and replacing capitalism and the State since Bakunin clashed with Marx in the International.

Third, those paying attention would have concluded that the fate of Social Democracy and its degeneration into "Opportunism" would have shown why anarchists reject taking part in the State by contesting elections. This only "trains" workers in letting others act for them and so "disaccustom the people to the direct care of their own interests and schools the ones in slavishness and the others in intrigues and lies."[41] As Kropotkin stressed:

[39] "L'Action directe et la Grève générale en Russie," *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 2 December 1905.

[40] Trotsky, *Stalin: An Appraisal of the man and his influence* (London: Panther History, 1969) 1: 106; Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils 1905–1921* (New York: Random House, 1974) 77–9.

[41] Errico Malatesta, *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014), 210; also see section J.2 of *AFAQ*.



"[e]ffective power in the local soviets relentlessly gravitated to the executive committees, and especially their presidia. Plenary sessions became increasingly symbolic and ineffectual".[7]

Combined with the rise of executive power, the "new" State also saw an increase in bureaucracy which started immediately with the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks:

> "The old state's political apparatus was 'smashed,' but in its place a new bureaucratic and centralised system emerged with extraordinary rapidity. After the transfer of government to Moscow in March 1918 it continued to expand [....] As the functions of the state expanded so did the bureaucracy, and by August 1918 nearly a third of Moscow's working population were employed in offices. The great increase in the number of employees [...] took place in early to mid-1918 and, thereafter, despite many campaigns to reduce their number, they remained a steady proportion of the falling population"[8]

Bureaucracy "grew by leaps and bounds. Control over the new bureaucracy constantly diminished" while "alienation between 'people' and 'officials,' which the soviet system was supposed to remove, was back again. Beginning in 1918, complaints about 'bureaucratic excesses,' lack of contact with voters, and new proletarian bureaucrats grew louder and louder."[9] In stark contrast to the promise to "take immediate steps to cut bureaucracy down to the roots" (389) it swiftly and dramatically increased. Perhaps Lenin was right to assert that the no-

ecutive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK)", *Soviet Studies*, XXXI, 1.

[7] Carmen Sirianni, *Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy* (London: Verso/NLB, 1982), 204.

[8] Richard Sakwa, "The Commune State in Moscow in 1918," *Slavic Review* 46, 3/4: 437–8.

[9] Anweiler, 242.

## The State and the Soviets

Lenin had stressed the need for "working bodies" and the fusion of legislative and executive bodies yet the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets elected a new Central Executive Committee (VTsIK, with 101 members) and created the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom, with 16 members). As the latter acted as the executive of the soviet executive, Lenin's promises in *The State and Revolution* did not last the night. Worse, a mere four days later the Sovnarkom unilaterally give itself legislative power simply by issuing a decree to this effect. This was not only the opposite of the example given by the Paris Commune but also made clear the party's pre-eminence over the soviets.

However, this would only come as a surprise if only *The State and Revolution* were read for Lenin had throughout 1917 argued that the "Bolsheviks must assume power" and "can and *must* take state power into their own hands."[4] This they did as the Bolshevik Central Committee admitted just after the October Revolution: "it is impossible to refuse a purely Bolshevik government without treason to the slogan of the power of the Soviets, since a majority at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets [...] handed power over to this government."[5] So in the "new" State, it was not the people nor the soviets which governed but rather the Bolsheviks.

Thus the VTsIK, in theory the highest organ of soviet power, was turned into little more than a rubber stamp for a Bolshevik executive. This was aided by the activities of its Bolshevik dominated presidium which circumvented general meetings, postponed regular sessions and presented it with policies which had already been implemented by the Sovnarkom.[6] In addition,

[4] *CW* 26: 19.

[5] Robert V. Daniels (ed.), *A Documentary History of Communism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960) 1: 128–9.

[6] Charles Duval, "Yakov M. Sverdlov and the All-Russian Central Ex-



> "We see in the incapacity of the statist socialist to understand the true historical problem of socialism a gross error of judgement [...] To tell the workers that they will be able to introduce the socialist system *while retaining the machine of the State* and only changing the men in power; to prevent, instead of aiding, the mind of the workers, progressing towards *the search for new forms of life* that would be *their* own – that is in our eyes a historic mistake which borders on the criminal."[42]

Instead of electioneering, "anarchists, since the beginnings of the International to the present, have taken an active part in the workers organisations formed for the direct struggle of Labour against Capital. This struggle, while serving far more powerfully than any indirect action to secure some improvements in the life of the worker and opening up the eyes of the workers to the evil done to society by capitalist organisation and by the State that upholds it, this struggle also awakes in the worker thoughts concerning the forms of consumption, production and direct exchange between those concerned, without the intervention of the capitalist and the State."[43]

Finally, Lenin's work is the source of the common assertion by Marxists that most anarchists supported their ruling class during the First World War. Regardless of his comment about "the few anarchists" who "preserved a sense of honour and a conscience" (380) by opposing the war, in reality pro-war anarchists in spite of having "amongst them comrades whom we love and respect most" were "not numerous" and "almost all" of the anarchists "have remained faithful to their convictions".[44] Nor does Lenin mention that these few – which, sadly, included

[42] Kropotkin, *Modern*, 189–190.

[43] Kropotkin, *Modern*, 169.

[44] Malatesta, 379, 385. Similarly, of the syndicalist unions only the CGT in France supported the war – unlike the vast the majority of Marxist par-

Kropotkin – had rejected Bakunin's position (turn the imperialist war into a revolution) in favour of Engels' defence of the fatherland while, ironically, Lenin went the opposite way.[45]

## Socialism

*The State and Revolution* is primarily a work on political structures and an ideological defence for Lenin's new positions. There is very little in it on socialism or, more correctly, the initial steps the socialist State would take once power had been seized but those few words are significant.

The key factor for Lenin is not who manages production but rather who owns property. "The means of production are no longer the private property of individuals" but rather they would "belong to the whole of society" (376) and while there would, initially, be differences in wealth "the *exploitation* of man by man will have become impossible because it will be impossible to seize the *means of production* – the factories, machines, land, etc. – and make them private property." (377)

Yet it is perfectly possible for exploitation to exist without private property – it depends on how society "owns" the means of production. Do workers manage their own labour or does someone else – the State – do that? Lenin's vision of socialism sets up the latter possibility by equating socialism with universal wage-labour rather than its abolition:

> "*All* citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state [...] *All* citizens becomes employees and workers of a *single* countrywide state 'syndi-

ties and unions (significantly, the CGT was a member of the Marxist Second International).

[45] As regards Lenin's rejection of Engels position, see "What Lenin Made of the Testament of Engels" by the ex-communist Bertram D. Wolfe (*Marxism: One Hundred Years in the Life of a Doctrine* [New York: The Dial Press, 1965]).



> gency supplies and by arresting the leaders of the protest, who were often Mensheviks or Left SRs [...] they did not scruple when they deemed it necessary to deploy armed force to suppress strikes, to confiscate ration cards or even to dismiss strikers en masse and then rehire them selectively. The Bolsheviks expected the working class to speak with one voice – in favour of the regime – and when they didn't they, who had once excoriated the Mensheviks for their refusal to accept that a true proletariat existed in Russia, charged the working class with being no more than a mass of uprooted peasants with a thoroughly petty-bourgeois psychology."[3]

These developments did not come out of the blue. They reflected the clash of Bolshevik ideology and prejudices with reality, a clash in which the former made the latter worse. They also reflected the changed perspectives of those who found themselves in positions of power within a centralised, hierarchical, top-down social organisation – the State.

While such factors as economic crisis, civil war, imperialist invention, a "declassed" or "disappeared" working class were later invoked by Leninists (starting with Trotsky in the 1930s) to rationalise and justify the anti-socialist decisions of the Bolsheviks which so obviously pathed the way for Stalinism, as we will show it was primarily the combination of ideology and the realities of the centralised political and economic structures the Bolshevik favoured which proved the anarchist position correct and showed the nativity of *The State and Revolution*.

[3] S.A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China: A Comparative History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008), 201. Also see section H.6 of *AFAQ* for a fuller discussion of these events.

"The Bolsheviks established their power in the localities through soviets, soldiers' committees, factory committees, and Red Guards. Numbering less than 350,000 in October 1917, the party had little option but to allow such independent organisations extensive leeway. Yet the same desperate problems of unemployment and lack of food and fuel that helped turn the workers against the Provisional Government soon began to turn workers against the Bolsheviks. In the first half of 1918, some 100,000 to 150,000 workers across Russia took part in strikes, food riots and other protests, roughly on a par with labour unrest on the eve of the February Revolution. In this context, the Bolsheviks struggled to concentrate authority in the hands of the party and state organs. [...] In spring 1918, worker discontent translated into a renewal of support for the Mensheviks and, to a lesser extent, the SRs, causing the Bolsheviks to cancel soviet elections and close down soviets that proved uncooperative, thus initiating the process whereby soviets and trade unions were turned into adjuncts to a one-party state. When the Whites seized leadership of the anti-Bolshevik movement in the latter months of 1918, however, most workers swung back in support of the government. During the civil war, labour unrest continued [...] the Bolsheviks generally reacted by rushing in emer-

party and its prejudices against the peasantry, this helped to alienate the bulk of the population against the new regime – an alienation reinforced by numerous other Bolshevik policies such as the creation of "poor peasants' committees" and the forced requisition of food (driven, in part, due to lack of goods to trade with the peasants, a lack Bolshevik economic policies made worse). Bolshevik attitudes to the peasants undoubtedly made the situation worse.



> cate' [...] The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labour and pay." (383)

There is some talk of how we "must *start* with the expropriation of the capitalists, with the establishment of workers' control over the capitalists" but why workers would need to control capitalists who have had their property expropriated is not immediately obvious. A closer read shows that Lenin had no desire to *immediately* expropriate the capitalists and introduce workers' management of production. Instead the capitalists would remain and control "must be exercised not by a state of bureaucrats, but by a state of *armed workers*".[46] (380)

While the political structures created by capitalism had to be smashed, the economic ones had to be used as the "economic foundation" (346) for socialism:

> "A witty German Social-Democrat [...] called the *postal service* an example of the socialist economic system. This is very true. At the present the postal service is a business organised on the lines of state-*capitalist* monopoly. Imperialism is gradually transforming all trusts into organisations of a similar type, in which [...] one has the same bourgeois bureaucracy. But the mechanism of social management is here already to hand. Once we have overthrown the capitalists [...] and smashed the bureaucratic machinery of the modern state, we shall have a splendidly-equipped mechanism, freed from the 'parasite', a mechanism which can very well be set going by the united workers themselves, who will hire technicians, foremen and accountants, and pay them *all*, as indeed *all* 'state' officials in general, workmen's wages. Here is a

[46] Also see section H.3.14 of *AFAQ*.

> concrete, practical task which can immediately be fulfilled in relation to all trusts, a task whose fulfilment will rid the working people of exploitation" (345)

The Bolshevik's "immediate aim" was to "organise the whole economy on the lines of the postal service" and "on the basis of what capitalism has already created". (345) So the structures created by the capitalists and *their* State – fitting for *their* priorities and interests – would be extended with "the conversion of all citizens into workers and other employees of one huge 'syndicate' – the whole state – and the complete subordination of the entire work of this syndicate to a genuinely democratic state, *the state of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies*." (380)

Control, then, would be by the State – initially over the capitalists but eventually of State employees. Lenin is well aware of Engels' infamous article "On Authority"[47] in which he "ridicules the muddled ideas of the Proudhonists, who call themselves 'anti-authoritarians', i.e., repudiated all authority, all subordination, all power. Take a factory, a railway, a ship on the high seas, said Engels: is it not clear that not one of these complex technical establishments, based on the use of machinery and the systematic co-operation of many people, could function without a certain amount of subordination and, consequently, without a certain amount of authority or power?" (353) Yet Engels argues much more strongly than that:

> "organisation [...] means that questions are settled in an authoritarian way. The automatic machinery of the big factory is much more despotic than the small capitalists who employ workers ever have been [...] If man, by dint of his knowledge and inventive genius, has subdued the forces of nature,

[47] For a critique of Engels' article, see section H.4 of *AFAQ*.



# Practice

Of course, the anarchist position may be wrong and Lenin's right. We discover this through practice so we need to look at what happened after the Bolshevik party seized power and started to implement their vision of socialism.[1]

While often portrayed as a *coup d'état*, in reality the Bolsheviks did have significant popular support in the main industrial centres and the October Revolution took place only once the party had a majority in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets. They then gained a majority of votes in the Second All-Russian Soviet Congress for ratifying the overthrow of the provisional government and its replacement by some-kind of soviet system. The question is, what happened next?

We concentrate on the Bolshevik's relations with the urban working class as this was their favoured class and the class the new State was meant to ensure was the ruling class.[2] We cannot cover everything and will by necessity focus on certain key developments which historian S.A. Smith summarises well:

[1] We quote exclusively from academic accounts of the new regime as these confirm the analysis presented by anarchists. For example, compare the accounts of bureaucratic paralysis presented below to the summaries by Goldman in *My Disillusionment in Russia* on pages 99 and 253 and Kropotkin in *Direct Struggle against Capital* on 490 and 584.

[2] Given the size of Russian peasantry within the population, it would have been impossible for the Bolsheviks to gain a majority in the republic they had supported previously (and, indeed, they received 25% of the vote to the Constituent Assembly while the peasant party, the SRs, received 57%). Gaining a majority in the urban soviets elected by workers and soldiers was feasible and may explain Lenin's new perspective in 1917. The new regime gave priority to urban workers and built in an institutional bias in voting of approximately five-to-one against the peasants.. While fitting for a Marxist

And it is now to that question, the reality of the Bolshevik regime that we turn.



> the latter avenge themselves upon him by subjecting him, in so far as he employs them, to a veritable despotism independent of all social organisation."[48]

Lenin's aim was to turn the new economy into a single factory under the control of the State and yet did not conclude that this would be "more despotic" than capitalism. He completely fails to realise that without workers' management of production when "equality is achieved for all members of society *in relation* to ownership of the means of production, that is, equality of labour and wages" (381) it is just turning them into wage-slaves of the State bureaucracy. Capitalism – individual ownership by the few – turns into State-Capitalism – collective ownership by the few in the new centralised structures of the State and the institutions inherited from capitalism.[49]

There is nothing in Lenin's work which suggests anything like Proudhon's vision of socialism built by workers themselves using their own organisations:

> "under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is *social* ownership [...] We do not want expropriation by the State [...] it is still monarchical, still wage-labour. We want [...] democratically organised workers' associations [...] the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic and social Republic."[50]

Similarly, there is no notion that a "strongly centralised Government" could "*command* that a prescribed quantity" of a

[48] *MECW* 23: 423.
[49] See section H.3.13 of *AFAQ*.
[50] Proudhon, *Property*, 377–8.

good "be sent to such a place on such a day" and be "received on a given day by a specified official and stored in particular warehouses" was not only "undesirable" but also "wildly Utopian" not least because it could not utilise "the co-operation, the enthusiasm, the local knowledge" of the people.[51] Hence the anarchist prediction "that to hand over to the State all the main sources of economic life" and "also the management of all the main branches of industry" would "create a new instrument of tyranny. State capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy and capitalism." This "new bureaucracy would end by making expropriation hateful in the eyes of all."[52]

## The Party

The most obvious difference between the theory of *The State and Revolution* and the practice of the new regime is that the book makes next-to-no mention of the vanguard party and its role. The most significant mention is ambiguous:

> "By educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat, capable of assuming power and leading the whole people to socialism, of directing and organising the new system, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the working and exploited people in organising their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie." (328)

Is it the proletariat or its vanguard which assumes power? Lenin's other writings during 1917 make it clear – it is the vanguard, the party, which assumes power.[53] Given this, we need

[51] Kropotkin, *Direct*, 32.
[52] Kropotkin, *Direct*, 165, 527.
[53] See section H.3.11 of *AFAQ*.



officials. Discussing the Bolsheviks in 1905 Trotsky points out this tendency existed from the start:

> "The habits peculiar to a political machine were already forming in the underground. The young revolutionary bureaucrat was already emerging as a type. The conditions of conspiracy, true enough, offered rather meagre scope for such formalities of democracy as electiveness, accountability and control. Yet, undoubtedly the committeemen narrowed these limitations considerably more than necessity demanded and were far more intransigent and severe with the revolutionary workingmen than with themselves, preferring to domineer even on occasions that called for lending an attentive ear to the voice of the masses."[65]

Unsurprisingly, Lenin also spent a lot of energy fighting the bureaucracy of his own party in 1917 to push the revolution forward. As Trotsky reported:

> "As often happens, a sharp cleavage developed between the classes in motion and the interests of the party machines. Even the Bolshevik Party cadres, who enjoyed the benefit of exceptional revolutionary training, were definitely inclined to disregard the masses and to identify their own special interests and the interests of the machine on the very day after the monarchy was overthrown. What, then, could be expected of these cadres when they became an all-powerful state bureaucracy?"[66]

*AFAQ*.
[65] Trotsky, 101.
[66] Trotsky, 298.

to understand the nature of the party Lenin spent his life building and whose ideology would necessarily shape the decisions being made and structures being built.

The first thing to note about the vanguard is how important it is for socialism. Without the right kind of party, socialism would be impossible. As Lenin stressed in 1902 "*there could not have been* Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers" as it must "be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness" while the "theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals."[54] The party was needed to educate a class which could never develop socialist ideas by itself:

> "there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the *only* choice is — either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course [...] Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology *in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree* means to strengthen bourgeois ideology. There is much talk of spontaneity. But the *spontaneous* development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology [...] Hence, our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is *to combat spontaneity, to divert* the working-class movement from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social Democracy."[55]

[54] *The Lenin Anthology*, 24.

[55] *The Lenin Anthology*, 28–9.



and strengthening the Social-Democratic Labour Party" and "if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions may actually become superfluous."[61] Building the party remains the end and working class self-organisation merely a means.

As well as privileging the party over the class, within the party it privileges the leadership over the membership. The leadership naturally substitutes itself for the membership as required by "the transformation of the power of ideas into the power of authority, the subordination of lower Party bodies to higher ones".[62] A centralised, top-down perspective becomes a necessity:

> "it is the organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy as opposed to the organisational principle of opportunist Social-Democracy. The latter strives to proceed from the bottom upward [...] The former strives to proceed from the top downward."[63]

The need for centralisation flows from the assumptions of vanguardism for if socialist consciousness comes from outside the working class then that also applies within the party. Hence the need for central control beyond the prejudices that it is more efficient and effective than federalism.[64] So the vanguard party is centralised like the capitalist system it claims to oppose. Anarchists have long argued that the centralisation of the State structure produced around it a bureaucracy and, unsurprisingly, the Bolshevik party likewise produced a caste of

[61] *CW* 12: 43–4.

[62] *CW* 7: 367.

[63] *CW* 7: 396–7.

[64] Space excludes a discussion of the false nature of such notions as shown by limitations of the Bolshevik Party in 1917, see section H.5.12 of

Ignoring the obvious point that "history" shows no such thing – as an obvious counter-example, in 1917 "the masses were incomparably more revolutionary than the Party, which in turn was more revolutionary than its committeemen"[56] – this perspective cannot help give the party and more particularly its leadership a privileged position. The obvious conclusion is that to disagree with the party and its leadership was to show the absence of socialist consciousness. The party, then, substitutes itself for the working class.[57] This perspective helps explain one of Lenin's stranger comments in *The State and Revolution*:

> "We are not utopians, we do not 'dream' of dispensing at once with all administration, with all subordination. These anarchist dreams, based upon incomprehension of the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship, are totally alien to Marxism, and, as a matter of fact, serve only to postpone the socialist revolution until people are different. No, we want the socialist revolution with people as they are now, with people who cannot dispense with subordination, control, and 'foremen and accountants'." (344)

Ignoring the awkward fact administration no more equates to subordination than organisation equates to authority and so these "anarchist dreams" existed only in Lenin's head, this statement flows naturally from the perspective that the working class people cannot by their own struggles change themselves.[58] At best the majority can recognise that the party embodies its interests and vote for it (and even join it, if the party

[56] Trotsky, *Stalin* 1: 305.

[57] For a critique of vanguardism, see section H.5 of *AFAQ*.

[58] While recognising the need for anarchists to organise to influence the class struggle, Bakunin also recognised that people learn through struggle



considers them suitable). Perhaps it will be objected that Lenin does add that this "subordination, however, must be to the armed vanguard of all the exploited and working people, i.e., to the proletariat" (345) but this is question begging – for surely the proletariat are people too? How can that class also dispense "at once with all administration, with all subordination"? But then he talks about "establishing strict, iron discipline backed by the state power of the armed workers". (345)

This is significant for during the 1905 revolution he mocked the Mensheviks for only wanting "pressure from below" which was "pressure by the citizens on the revolutionary government." Instead, he argued for pressure "from above as well as from below," where "pressure from above" was "pressure by the revolutionary government on the citizens." He notes that Engels "appreciated the importance of action from above" and that he saw the need for "the utilisation of the revolutionary governmental power" for "[l]imitation, in principle, of revolutionary action to pressure from below and renunciation of pressure also from above is *anarchism*."[59]

The 1905 revolution also saw this deep-routed suspicion of working class self-activity surface in the position of the St. Petersburg Bolsheviks who were convinced that "only a strong party along class lines can guide the proletarian political movement and preserve the integrity of its program, rather than a political mixture of this kind, an indeterminate and vacillating political organisation such as the workers council represents and cannot help but represent."[60] So the soviets could not reflect workers' interests because they were elected by the workers. Lenin, to his credit, fought against this position when he turned from exile but support for the soviets was simply seen, as he put it in 1907, "for the purpose of developing

and draw socialist conclusions, see *Basic Bakunin*, 101–3

[59] *CW* 8: 474, 478, 480, 481.

[60] quoted by Anweiler, 77.